

NSC BRIEFING

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VENEZUELA

- I. Political tension, which was highlighted by the abortive military coup of 7 September and the demonstration of civilian strength in the 8 September general strike, has not diminished.
 - A. Rumors of renewed military plotting and the failure of parties to agree thus far on a single presidential candidate or slate for the November elections have contributed to instability, and the political outlook is uncertain.
 - B. Admiral Larrazabal, president of the governing junta and probably Venezuela's most popular figure at this time, may soon announce his candidacy as an "independent" with the endorsement of one of the major parties.
 1. Such a move could split the major parties and further threaten the political unity program which has been endorsed by all factions.
 - C. The military is already divided and has lost considerable prestige as a result of civilian-military disagreements since last July.
 1. Inter-service rivalry may be neutralizing the armed forces as a political factor. Larrazabal, who has the firm support of the Navy, commanded by his brother, is building up the naval marine forces possibly as a counterweight to the army.

II. The Communists, meanwhile, are consolidating the impressive gains they have registered in Venezuela since early 1958.

A. They were particularly active in the 8 September general strike when they encouraged other civilian groups to demonstrate against military coup efforts.

1. These civilian groups are partly armed.

B. If another general strike is called to force the wholesale removal of officers suspected of plotting against the regime, or to demand stricter controls over the military, serious violence might result.